

Senate Bill 348
March 31, 2011
Presented by Art Noonan
House Fish, Wildlife & Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Art Noonan, Deputy Director of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here in opposition of Senate Bill 348.

SB348 mandates \$3,000 per wolf in Montana be allocated for radio-monitoring and control actions. Based on the 2010 statewide minimum estimate of 566 wolves, the total annual allocation under SB348 would be no less than \$1,698,000.

Wolf monitoring is already one of our most intensive monitoring efforts. Given the significant additional amount of monitoring and control dollars proposed in this bill to be re-distributed to wolves, it is necessary and prudent to identify program sources for these dollars. In all likelihood, existing survey and inventory efforts directed to the consistent monitoring of deer, elk, antelope and other hunted species would be significantly reduced. This would immediately result in a reduction in understanding of those species' population levels and a consequent reduced ability to routinely and appropriately review and adjust prescribed harvest levels. In effect, wildlife monitoring efforts would be significantly reduced to accommodate the proposed increased wolf monitoring. Monitoring for some other game species, to include moose, sheep and goat, are already at a bare minimum, and would be at risk to continue as a result of funds for these species needing to be redirected to meet the requirements of this bill, thus jeopardizing hunting seasons on those species.

From the standpoint of monitoring wolves to assess population status and develop population management prescriptions, the current level of monitoring by FWP is sufficient and beyond the level of monitoring currently directed at many other species.

We appreciate the sponsor's desire to see that funding for wolf management is provided, regardless of the source. A problem with this bill is that it creates an unstable funding mechanism based on the number of wolves, and allocates funding not based on identified needs, but rather on a random variable. FWP recommends the bill be amended to reflect a fixed amount that is based on identified needs to implement identified tasks. Towards that end, FWP recommends and supports an amendment that would allocate not more than \$800,000 for wolf management activities, to include collaring, control actions, management activities, and implementation of hunting seasons.

FWP manages wildlife at the population scale, not by individual animal or group of animals. The requirements in Section 1 to "implement a monitoring system that is capable of determining and tracing the movement and population of wolf packs" greatly exceeds the information requirements needed to manage Montana's wolf population. FWP recommends that if this bill moves forward, Section 1 be amended out of it.

As the relisting of wolves did not result from insufficient monitoring of Montana wolves, but rather Wyoming's failure to have an approved state management plan, the current level of monitoring was and is sufficient to accommodate the delisting criteria relative to numbers of wolves and breeding pairs in Montana.

From the standpoint of management response to wolf depredations of livestock, FWP currently works with USDA APHIS Wildlife Services to address lethal removal of wolves. FWP's specific role is to prescribe response and control actions which Wildlife Services then implements. To date, lethal removal of wolves relative to confirmed livestock losses have been significant. In 2009, 145 wolves were lethally removed relative to 309 confirmed livestock losses and in 2010, 141 wolves were lethally removed relative to 164 confirmed livestock losses.

As the wolf has come to Montana via federal reintroduction efforts and that state management of wolves to include hunter harvest and population control is currently unavailable given relisting, it seems contrary to demand that Montana hunters alone carry this increased cost at the direct loss of other programs that impact not only those hunters but Montana at large. This bill does not punish FWP, but punishes Montana's resident hunters who have voluntarily paid for wildlife conservation for the past 100 years.

Given the adequacy of current management and value of other existing programs as they are currently funded by hunters, FWP urges a Do Not Pass for SB348 as presented. FWP would support amendments to address concerns with this bill, and has prepared amendments for your review. With those amendments, FWP would support this bill.

PROPOSED Amendments to Senate Bill 348

1. Page 2, Lines 9 through 20.
Strike: section 1 in its entirety
Renumber: subsequent sections
2. Page 2, line 23.
Strike: line 23 through "report" on line 24
Insert: "\$800,000"
3. Page 2, line 27.
Following: subsection (a)
Insert: "(b) monitoring of wolves and wolf packs;"
Renumber: subsections (b) and (c)
4. Page 2, line 28.
Following: "activities;"
Strike: "and"
5. Page 2, line 29.
Following: "livestock"
Strike: "."
Insert: "; and"
Insert: "(e) administering hunting season for wolves."